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# **Minority Electoral Participation: Institutional Remedies against the Political Exclusion of Ethnic Minorities**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper, we investigated the impact of different institutions on ethnic minorities' political participation. Based on the results of a hierarchical cross-country comparison, we found that individuals belonging to ethnic minorities were less likely to participate in national elections than members of the majority groups within the same country. We tested whether this negative effect of belonging to an ethnic minority group on political participation could be attenuated by inclusive institutions such as suffrage rights, horizontal power-sharing institutions (Proportional electoral system PR, effective proportionality, the number of government parties) or vertical power-dividing institutions in terms of federalism (subnational elections and subnational authority) attenuated the negative effect of belonging to an ethnic minority group. The results of multilevel analyses showed that suffrage rights attenuate the negative effect of minority status on political participation. In contrast, power dividing enhances the negative effect of belonging to an ethnic minority group on political participation.

## Introduction

Political participation and political equality are two of the most basic democratic ideals (Dahl, 1998, 2006). Theoretically, they are perfectly compatible. In practice, however, political participation is highly unequal. Unequal participation can lead to unequal influence, which questions the principle of representative democracies in which democratic responsiveness is based on citizen participation. Moreover, unequal participation is not randomly distributed, but systematically biased (Dahl, 2006; Lijphart, 1997). This means that not all interests are equally represented and, therefore, that the maxim of responsiveness and political equality is violated (Rueschemeyer, 2004; Teorell, 2007). Moreover, “who votes and who doesn't has important consequences for who gets elected and for the content of public policies” (Lijphart, 1997, p. 4). This implies that the abstention of specific groups of individuals leads to the systematic exclusion of interests, which can reduce political support and endanger political stability (Easton, 1965).

In this paper, we analyze the political participation of ethnic minorities. Based on the results of participatory research, ethnicity is an important factor in political abstention (Norris, 2004; Sandovici & Listhaug, 2010). In light of ongoing migration, we argue that this can pose a serious problem for contemporary democracies because poor social, economic, and political integration of minorities might endanger social harmony and provoke civic unrest. Furthermore, the failure to represent minorities' voices and the systematic exclusion of their interests might lead to decreased democratic legitimacy and political instability (Cain, 1992, p. 273). The permanent underrepresentation of ethnic minorities might also contribute to their alienation from the political system. Consequently, minorities might display less respect for the laws that are enacted without their legitimate input by legislative bodies which they view as illegitimate. Moreover, if a sizeable minority group is not able to secure its political representation, the pressure for secession and the establishment of an independent nation might increase (Zimmermann, 1994, p. 3).

Given these challenges to contemporary democracies, knowing why ethnic minorities participate in the political system and, more importantly, what can be done to increase their participation, is of great importance. We argue that ethnic minorities can only secure political equality and political representation if they decide to participate in the political process. Of course, as Sandovici and Listaugh (2010) stated, there are many different forms of political participation. Certainly, the use of *all* channels is important for the democratic process, because it helps to raise new issues. Nevertheless, we contend that *voting* is the only form of

participation that actually allows for political representation. According to the responsive model of representative democracy, electoral participation is the most important mean for citizens to inform governing officials of their preferences and needs (Teorell, 2006). Therefore, we focused on the determinants of ethnic minority participation at national elections.

Researchers have reported that minorities have a lower probability of participating in politics simply because they *are* minorities. When minority status means that an individual's preferences are neither heard nor included in the political system, (conventional) political participation is not rational in a Downsian sense (1957). One of the most important features of democracies then should be that minorities can become majorities. In well-functioning democracies, political losers must become winners from time to time and vice versa (Anderson, Blais, Bowler, Donovan, & Listhaug, 2005). However, this idea of changing majorities becomes problematic when the status of political loser is congruent with invariable social characteristics. We argue that this situation is most probable for ethnic minorities because the chance that their culturally specific preferences are heard and included in the political system is low. Even more problematic, ethnic boundaries often correspond to other salient political cleavages (Htun 2004), which makes it unlikely that minority preferences are represented by established parties.

As Lijphart (1977, 1999) points out, the inclusion of ethnic minorities can be facilitated by institutional settings. In our paper, we tested several institutions that are assumed to be remedies with regard to their ability to promote the political inclusion of ethnic minorities. We contend that countries with open electoral systems and power-sharing institutions are more successful in including ethnic minorities. Effective inclusion takes place at every step of the electoral process, from suffrage rights to election rules and the degree of representation (Holden, 2006). In addition, the sharing of political power between different groups and various governmental levels is suggested to foster inclusion (Lijphart, 1999; Vatter, 2009).

Our investigation of the inclusiveness of several institutions is based on the European Social Survey (ESS4; 2008). The sample was comprised of more than 4,000 individuals from 25 countries who were asked whether they belonged to a minority ethnic group and whether they voted in previous national elections. We conducted multilevel analyses and tested whether (1) belonging to an ethnic minority group affected an individual's electoral participation, (2) the

strength of this effect varied between countries, and (3) these country differences could be explained by institutions that allowed for better inclusion, including those that motivated ethnic minorities to participate in elections. Specifically, we tested whether the assumed institutions extenuated the negative impact of belonging to a minority group on electoral participation.

This paper is composed of four sections. In section 1, we elaborate upon the idea that ethnic minorities exhibit lower electoral participation and consider the possible institutional mechanisms that might attenuate the negative effect. Section 2 describes the research methodology. In section 3, we present the results of the empirical tests. Finally, section 4 contains our conclusions.

## **Theoretical and Empirical Insights**

### ***Electoral Participation of Ethnic Minorities***

The first question examined in this section is whether ethnic minorities participate less in elections than their compatriots. Results of participatory research have shown that ethnicity is an important determinant of political abstention (Norris, 2004; Sandovici & Listhaug, 2010). It is generally assumed that ethnic minorities do not sufficiently participate in politics due to biases in the political opportunity structures of the host countries (Fennema & Tillie, 2001). However, this argument focuses specifically on ethnic minorities without voting rights. It does not address the question of why ethnic minorities participate less than their compatriots, even though they have the right to vote.<sup>1</sup>

According to rational choice theorists, the decision to vote is based on a simple calculation: people vote if the benefits of voting outweigh the costs (Blais, 2000; Downs, 1957). Thus, a rational individual must decide whether his or her vote is likely to influence the election outcome. If the preferred candidate is sure to win, voting is irrational. If an individual's personal favorite is sure to lose, the same logic holds true. In sum, if the result is already clear before the elections, the expected benefit of voting will be nil. According to rational choice theories, rational voters should not vote in this situation (Blais, 2000). While rational choice theorists regard voting always as irrational (Blais, 2000), the approach might, nevertheless, prove useful for the present analysis. If voting is already assumed to be irrational for the

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that we analyzed only ethnic minorities who had the right to vote in our models. Respondents who reported that they belonged to an ethnic minority group but did not have the right to vote in the country in which they lived were excluded from the sample.

average voter, it should be even more unreasonable for ethnic minorities. Although a single vote will probably never make a difference in an election (Blais, 2000), voters who are members of the majority group can at least reasonably expect that their preferred candidate might win. In contrast, the chance for representatives of minority groups to get elected is usually much smaller. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that ethnic minorities are generally less willing to vote than their compatriots.

Whereas most empirical findings indicate that ethnic minorities are less likely to go to the polls, Sandovici and Listaugh (2010) argued that ethnicity could have either a positive or a negative impact on an individual's level of political involvement. On the one hand, a minority status can lead to low participation rates, such as in the case of a group<sup>2</sup> that is marginalized. On the other hand, ethnicity can work as a catalyst for participation because group identity and group solidarity might be strong motivational factors (Sandovici & Listaugh, 2010). However, at least in respect to voting, Sandovici and Listaugh (2010) found that ethnic minorities were less likely to participate at national elections than majorities.

A first look at our data seems to confirm these results. Table 1 shows the percentage of people belonging to an ethnic minority group who participated in the election in comparison to their compatriots. Our analyses is based on 40'000 respondents in 25 countries from the European Social Survey Wave 4<sup>3</sup> (ESS4; 2008). To measure electoral participation, we used the question from the ESS4 on voting<sup>4</sup> and recoded the responses binomially with a value of (1) indicating that a person took part in the last elections. For our main independent variable, ethnic minority membership, we used the question from the ESS4 on ethnicity,<sup>5</sup> where 1 refers to the fact that an individual self-reported that he or she belonged to an ethnic minority group. With this operationalization we are certain to only count individuals as ethnic minorities who *actually* stated that they did not belong to a country's majority population. Accordingly, we account for the common definition of ethnic identities as social constructions and measure the affective sense of belonging. We argue that ethnic identities are primarily dependent upon one's own feelings, rather than upon specific, measurable attributes (see Norris 2004).

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, we could not differentiate between various ethnic groups within a specific country because, in contrast to most previous studies, we used a comparative approach. Our aim is to show and explain differences among countries, rather than within them.

<sup>3</sup> Latvia was excluded due to the absence of minorities in the sample. Russia and the Ukraine were excluded from our sample because we included only democracies. The 25 countries in our sample are listed in Table 1.

<sup>4</sup> B11: Some people don't vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last [country] national election in [month/year]?

<sup>5</sup> C32: Do you belong to a minority ethnic group in [country]?

Consistent with the results of previous empirical studies, Table 1 shows lower levels of electoral participation among ethnic minorities in most countries compared with members of the majority group. There are only four countries (i.e., Bulgaria, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) in which people belonging to an ethnic minority group are more likely to vote than their compatriots. It is particularly striking that all four countries are located in Eastern Europe and achieved democracy relatively recently in the early 1990s.

A closer look at these countries might contribute to a better understanding of this deviant pattern. In the case of Bulgaria, an ethnic cleansing against Turks took place in the late 1980s involving approximately 350,000 people. Another 350,000 Turks were forced to assimilate. Therefore, by the time the democratic transition began, they were truly integrated into the political life of Bulgaria. Thus, although Turks in Bulgaria might still characterize themselves as “minorities,” there are no relevant ethnic tensions left. This might explain why they do not participate less in elections than their compatriots (Raichev & Todorov, 2006). More importantly, the Turkish minority in Bulgaria is organized in its own party with representatives in Parliament (Ganev, 2004). Slovakia is similar to Bulgaria: the largest minority group is also organized in its own party and proportionally represented in Parliament (Essex Election Archive, 2010). Thus, ethnic minorities in these two countries might have decided to participate in the elections because they saw a chance to influence political decisions. In contrast, Slovenia and Poland are relatively homogenous countries with a high concentration of Catholics (Miheljak, 2006). Hence, the combination of a homogenous society and homogenous religious affiliations probably worked as an integrative mechanism.

**Table 1:** *Participation of Ethnic Minorities and Majorities by Country*

Country	Minority	Majority	Country	Minority	Majority
Belgium	80	92.51	Netherlands	58.06	75.25
Bulgaria	82.79	69.82	Norway	62.5	86.32
Croatia	72	79.27	Poland	91.67	73.03
Cyprus	59.26	94.28	Portugal	60	73.28
Czech Republic	32.56	58.46	Romania	67.9	67.3
Denmark	81.08	94.55	Slovakia	74.07	72.5
Estonia	40.72	70.12	Slovenia	80.41	77.31
Finland	54.17	83.6	Spain	67.5	81.67
France	55.74	78.43	Sweden	86.05	91.43
Germany	65.33	83.22	Switzerland	48.57	64.18
Greece	82.09	87.08	Turkey	72.66	81.04
Hungary	80.77	80.12	United Kingdom	62.24	71.41
Israel	68.82	77.82	<b>Overall</b>	67.97	78.28

*Note.* Share of individuals who stated that they participated in the last national election (%).

A closer look at Table 1 reveals that the gap between ethnic minorities and majorities differs considerably between countries. In some countries, the gap between the voter turnout of the majority and the minority population is only small, while it is rather large in others. Of course, Table 1 only shows the proportion of individuals. To test whether ethnic minority group membership leads to a lower propensity to participate in the electoral process, we have to rely on individual-level data. Consequently, our first hypothesis is:

*H1) An individual who describes him- or herself as belonging to an ethnic minority group has a lower probability of participating in elections than an individual who does not belong to an ethnic minority group.*

Admittedly, minority status is not the only important determinant of non-voting behavior. The literature provides several additional individual characteristics that explain electoral participation. There are five categories of explanatory factors for political participation (Bühlmann, 2006; Knight & Marsh, 2002). (1) Predispositions and resources, such as gender,<sup>6</sup> age,<sup>7</sup> and education,<sup>8</sup> are seen as basic determinants of electoral participation. Older and educated men are expected to show a higher propensity to participate in national elections than younger women with low education levels. (2) Political skills also influence electoral participation. Individuals who are interested in politics,<sup>9</sup> are ready to inform themselves about political matters<sup>10</sup>, and have the necessary skills to participate in elections<sup>11</sup> are expected to participate more often in politics. (3) Political attitudes and the manifestation of ideological values are seen as additional determinants of electoral participation. Specifically, individuals who feel close to a party<sup>12</sup> or are members of a party<sup>13</sup> should possess more motivation to go to the polls. (4) Social capital is another determinant of political participation (Franzen & Freitag, 2007). Voluntary work and social trust are viewed as important components of this concept. The majority of empirical studies examining social capital in an attempt to explain

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<sup>6</sup> F21: Sex was recoded as (1)=male and (0)=female.

<sup>7</sup> F31b: Age of respondent was calculated. We included only respondents who were at least 18 years of age and less than 99 years of age.

<sup>8</sup> F6: What is the highest level of education you have completed? Responses ranged from (0)=not completed primary education to (6)=second stage of tertiary.

<sup>9</sup> B1: How interested would you say you are in politics? Responses ranged from (0)= not at all to (3)=very interested.

<sup>10</sup> A5: On an average weekday, how much time, in total, do you spend reading newspapers? Responses ranged from (0)= no time to (7)= more than 3 hours.

<sup>11</sup> B2: How often does politics seem so complicated that you can't really understand what is going on? Responses ranged from (1)= frequently to (5)= never.

<sup>12</sup> B20a: Is there a party you feel closer to than all the other parties? Responses were (0)= no and (1)= yes.

<sup>13</sup> B21: Are you a member of any political party? Responses were (0)= no and (1)= yes.



electoral participation have found a positive effect of voluntary work for political organization<sup>14</sup> and social trust<sup>15</sup> on an individual's propensity to vote. (5) Variables measuring political support are also important factors for political participation. Individuals with high specific support,<sup>16</sup> which is typically measured by the degree of confidence in different political actors and/or institutions, and high diffuse support,<sup>17</sup> which is frequently measured by the degree of confidence in or satisfaction with the entire society and/or system, are more motivated to take part in national elections. To test our first hypothesis, we controlled for the effects of these five categories.

### ***Institutional Remedies for a Better Inclusion of Minorities***

Based on the findings in Table 1, we wonder whether the gaps between minority and majority electoral participation can be explained by the countries' different institutional settings. The question is, whether there are institutions which promote ethnic minorities' propensity of voting (i.e., make the electoral participation of ethnic minorities seem more rational).

Indeed, participation becomes more rational when the probability increases that an individual's vote makes a difference (Downs, 1957). One might argue that it is not rational for a member of an ethnic minority group to participate in elections when the probability to have an influence is low. However, in the literature, several institutional opportunities are discussed which can enhance the probability of (ethnic) minorities being heard. The most prominent theory, which highlights formal possibilities to include minorities, is Lijphart's (1977, 1999) idea of consociationalism. The consensus model of democracy aims at sharing, dispersing, and limiting power. Contrary to the majoritarian democracies, consensus democracies are apt to include minorities. In heterogeneous societies, the probability that "today's minority can become the majority in the next election" is low (Lijphart, 1999, p. 31). Thus, majoritarian rules are less appropriate in countries with different minority groups because they lower the chance for minorities to become the majority. Consequently, consensual forms of democracy are of major importance for ethnic minorities.

Lijphart (1977, 1984, 1999) highlights different institutional features that characterize

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<sup>14</sup> B14: Have you worked in a political party or action group? Responses were (0)= no and (1)= yes.

<sup>15</sup> A8: Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? Responses ranged from (0)= you can't be too careful to (10)= most people can be trusted.

<sup>16</sup> B4: Please tell me how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out [Parliament]. Responses ranged from (0)= no trust at all to (10)= complete trust.

<sup>17</sup> B27: And on the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]? Responses ranged from (0)=extremely dissatisfied to (10)= extremely satisfied.

consensual democracies and facilitate the inclusion of minorities' preferences. He distinguished horizontal (electoral system, coalitions) and vertical power sharing institutions (federalism). In this article, we added an additional basic institution by assuming that widespread suffrage rights are of crucial importance for the inclusion of ethnic minorities.

The most basic prerequisite for being heard is having a voice. There is no serious democratic theory that is not based on inclusiveness (Dahl, 1971). However, reality falls short of guaranteeing everyone the right to vote (Paxton, Bollen, Lee, & Kim, 2003). Hence, there is no country with universal suffrage.<sup>18</sup> According to Munck and Verkuilen (2002), “[a]lthough de jure restrictions on the right to vote are not found in current democracies, a wide battery of other restrictions, usually informal ones, curb the effective use of the formal right to vote and significantly distort the values of vote” (p. 11). Due to electoral as well as naturalization laws, there is a discrepancy between the electorate and citizenship in all established democracies. However, when citizenship is a precondition for voting rights, ethnic minorities are punished because the hurdles for electoral participation are either insurmountable or at least narrow. We argue that ethnic minorities, even if they do have suffrage rights (as is the case in the following analyses), are less motivated to go to the polls because their chance of being heard is low when their compatriots have no voting rights. Further, restrictive suffrage rights can be seen as a sign of a culture of low inclusiveness (Paxton et al., 2003).

As for the *horizontal power sharing*, it is argued that the electoral mechanism that best matches the idea of power sharing is based on proportional representation (PR) systems.<sup>19</sup> PR reduces the barriers for smaller parties that are representing the interests of minorities (Lijphart, 1977, 1999; Norris, 2008), as each party receives a number of seats in proportion of its votes. However, due to different formal attributes of electoral systems, such as district magnitude and legal thresholds, this proportionality varies among countries (Lijphart, 1991, 1999). Therefore, in addition to the formal electoral system, the effective proportionality<sup>20</sup> should be taken into account.

Due to the higher number of (minority) parties, PR has an additional feature that strengthens

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<sup>18</sup> Extent of universal suffrage: Starting from 100%, 0.25 to 1 percentage points were subtracted for each restriction for universal suffrage that applied. In total, 23 types of restrictions were accounted for. Source: Paxton et al. (2003).

<sup>19</sup> PR: proportional representation (0)= no; (1)= yes. Source: Database of Political Institutions (2009).

<sup>20</sup> Disproportionality of electoral system: Gallagher-Index; own calculations based on Mitchell/Gallagher (2008). Higher values indicate a more proportional system.

power sharing: it fosters the probability of large government coalitions,<sup>21</sup> or “executive power-sharing in broad coalition cabinets” (Lijphart, 1999, p. 34). Even if there are several parties in Parliament, the most important indicator of effective political inclusion is the number of effective parties in the government. It is argued that consensual and inclusive power sharing works best within a large executive (Anderson, 1998).

Of course, some doubt the potential of PR for minority inclusion. First, PR allows the inclusion of not only ethnic minorities, but also small parties from the radical right that might try to exclude ethnic minorities or veto consensual decisions (Norris, 2008). Second, as Rothschild (2002) contended, PR can hinder cross-group cooperation. One could even argue that this might lead to decreased engagement of ethnic minorities in national politics and, therefore, to lower participation scores in national elections. Third, as Stojanovic (2006) shows on the example of Switzerland, PR does not necessarily have an inclusive impact. Specifically, in a context, where groups are territorially concentrated, electoral districts mirror the territorial concentration of these groups and the districts are represented in parliament according to their population-share, majority rule might work as well as PR-rule.

Lijphart (1977, 1999, 2004) described *vertical power dividing* institutions in terms of federalism as the second dimension of consensual democracies. There are two main arguments why the decentralization of power is expected to have an inclusive impact. First, the transfer of decision-making abilities to elected subnational bodies broadens the opportunities for citizen participation. Second, federalism allows spatially concentrated minority groups to manage their own affairs and to protect their cultural interests within their own communities (Norris, 2008). These opportunities should foster political interest and engagement and, consequently, increase an individual’s propensity to vote. Drawing upon Gerring and Thacker (2005), we highlight two features of federalism. First, we argue that there must be the possibility for subnational elections.<sup>22</sup> Local electoral competition can increase the incentives of public officials to be responsive to the preferences of local inhabitants (Qian & Weingast, 1997), including the preferences of minorities. Greater responsiveness should then lead to an increase of participation willingness. Second, to be *effectively* autonomous, federal units must have authority over taxing, spending, and legislating,<sup>23</sup> given that it is only rational to participate when there is something upon which

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<sup>21</sup> Number of government parties: own calculations based on multiple election statistics.

<sup>22</sup> Auton: Are there autonomous regions? Responses were (0)= no and (1)= yes. Source: Database of Political Institutions (2009).

<sup>23</sup> Author: Do the state/provinces have authority over taxing, spending, or legislating? Responses were (0)= no and (1)= yes. Source: Database of Political Institutions (2009).

to decide.

However, there are skeptics who question the inclusive impact of federalism. Overlapping functions may reduce the clarity of responsibility and, therefore, electoral accountability (Powell & Whitten, 1993). Furthermore, territorial autonomy can reinforce ethnic differences and even lead to separation. Finally, one might argue that the incentives of federalism only work at the subnational level. Thus, one might assume that minority participation in national elections should not be influenced by the degree of federalism. In addition, it is possible that vertical power dividing fosters individual participation at the subnational, but not at the national level. Therefore, some would expect a negative impact of vertical power sharing on participation in *national* elections. However, this idea challenges Lijphart's (1999) initial idea regarding the inclusive impact of decentralization.

We do not assume that the aforementioned institutions foster electoral participation in a *direct* way. In fact, we suggest that suffrage rights as well as horizontal and vertical power-sharing institutions have an *interactive* impact. That is, they attenuate the (assumed) negative effect of belonging to an ethnic minority group on the propensity to vote. Consequently, our second hypothesis is:

*H2) The more widespread the suffrage rights in a country are, the better PR system work, the more government parties there are, whereas the more decentralized a country is, the weaker the negative impact of belonging to an ethnic minority group on electoral participation.*

We control for additional important contextual determinants, which could affect electoral participation. However, given the low number of countries, macro controls should not be too numerous. We, therefore, decided to include compulsory voting<sup>24</sup> and unemployment.<sup>25</sup> Both variables were frequently found to be important factors for electoral turnout (see Blais 2006). Beyond the voting system (Carter & Farrell, 2010), compulsory voting is seen as the most important institutional variable that explains turnout (Blais, 2006; Blais et al., 2003; Norris, 2002). The argument that going to the polls is more probable when voting is compulsory comes close to a tautology. However, the rules of compulsory voting can be more or less authoritative and the question remains whether the duty to vote also influences ethnic minorities.

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<sup>24</sup> Compulsory Voting: (0)= no; (1)= yes. Source: IDEA (2010).

<sup>25</sup> Unemployment, total (% of total labor force). Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank (2010).

Since the beginning of systematic cross-country investigation on electoral turnout, the economic situation has been part of the explanatory set (Jackman, 1987; Powell, 1986). Although the impact of wealth on turnout is not clear (Blais, 2006), there seems to be agreement that economic downturns increase turnout (Radcliff, 1992). As a result, we decided to include the unemployment rate as a control variable. Furthermore, in most countries it is the minorities that suffers most on unemployment.

## Research Design and Method

To test our assumptions about the interactive impact of institutions on ethnic minorities' electoral participation, we proceed in two steps. First, we test whether belonging to an ethnic minority group has a negative impact on an individual's propensity to vote in national elections. We also examine whether this effect varies among different countries in our sample. If there is no variation, it made no sense to suggest a differing cross-level impact of institutions.

Additionally, we control for the most important individual and contextual determinants of electoral participation as discussed above. In the second step, we test the second hypothesis by modeling the interactive effect of the institutional determinants. Specifically, we investigate whether widespread suffrage, PR, effective proportional representation, a high number of government parties, subnational authority, and subnational elections attenuate the negative effect of belonging to a minority group on electoral participation. Thus, we are not interested in the direct effect of institutions on diffuse support. We do not assume that these institutions foster electoral participation, but that they have a moderating impact on effects of individual characteristics (i.e., belonging to an ethnic minority group) on individual behavior and attitudes (i.e., propensity to participate in national elections).

To test our hypotheses, we use multilevel analyses that allow us to model a varying effect of belonging to an ethnic minority group on electoral participation (step 1) and to explain this variance by the interactive impact of the different inclusive institutions discussed above (step 2). The underlying principle of multilevel modeling is that intercepts of common linear ordinary least square (OLS)-regression analysis are allowed to vary around an overall mean:

$$(1) y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_1 X_{1ji} + \varepsilon_{ij}, \text{ where}$$

$$(2) \beta_{0j} = \beta_0 + \mu_{0j} \text{ (}\mu_{0j} \text{ stands for the residuals at the contextual level).}$$

Moreover, multilevel models permit the modeling of cross-level interactions, which allow us to measure the influence of contextual factors on the strength of the relationship between response and predictor variables at the lower level—methodologically speaking, the steepness of the slope.

Our dependent variable is dichotomous. Therefore, we do not use OLS-regression for our estimation, but transformed the dependent variable into a logit structure. Estimation and interpretation for logit-multilevel analysis are similar to conventional logit analysis (see Long, 1997). Schematically, the models upon which our analyses are based will have the following form:

$$(3) \text{ logit}(\pi_{ij}) = \beta_1 + \beta_2 X_{2ij} + \dots + \beta_n X_{nij} + \alpha_1 W_{1j} + \dots + \alpha_n W_{nj} + \gamma_1 W_{kj} X_{kij} + \varepsilon_{ij} + \mu_{kj} X_{kij} + \mu_{0j}$$

The propensity to participate in national elections ( $y$ ) of an individual  $i$  within a country  $j$  is explained by an overall mean of electoral participation ( $\beta_1$ ), individual characteristics ( $X$ , and their estimates,  $\beta$ ), contextual factors ( $W$ , and their estimates,  $\alpha$ ), cross-level interaction terms of the minority status ( $X_k$ ), and the respective institutional variables ( $W_k$ ) ( $W_{kj} X_{kij}$ , their estimates,  $\gamma$ ), in which the effect of the estimate is randomized ( $\beta_{kj}$ ), contextual variation ( $\mu_{0j}$  with an assumed mean of 0 and a total between-context variance of  $\sigma_\mu^2$ ), individual variation ( $\varepsilon_{ij}$  with an assumed mean of 0 and a total within-context variance of  $\sigma^2$ ), and slope variation ( $\mu_{kj} X_{kij}$ ). The overall variation ( $\sigma_\mu^2 + \sigma^2$ ) is divided into differences at the individual level (level-1 variance), which is explained by individual characteristics, and differences between contexts (level-2 variance), which are explained by contextual factors. The slope variance is explained by the interaction terms. We defer to a more thorough discussion of the method and refer to the relevant literature on multilevel analysis (Hox, 2010; Jones, 1997; Snijders & Bosker, 1999; Teachman & Crowder, 2002).

## Empirical Results

As mentioned above, we proceeded stepwise. Table 2 shows the results of the first step. The four models examine the impact of belonging to an ethnic minority group on participation in national elections. The results of the empty model demonstrate that individual electoral participation varies significantly among the 25 countries in our sample. Whereas most of the variance in participation propensity is due to individual characteristics (91%), approximately 9% of the overall variance is explained by contextual factors.<sup>26</sup> The remaining three models seem to confirm our first hypothesis: An individual who describes him- or herself as belonging to an ethnic minority group has a lower probability of participating in elections than an individual who belongs to the majority group. This effect varies significantly among countries as indicated by the significant slope variance in model 2 and remains strong when we control for important individual as well as contextual factors (see model 3).

**Table 2 : Minority Electoral Participation**

	Empty Model	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>FIXED EFFECTS</b>				
Constant	1.36 (.11)**	1.38 (.11)**	1.38 (.11)**	-1.62 (.21)***
<b>Individual Level</b>				
<i>Ethnic Minority</i>	-	-0.43 (.05)**	-0.53 (.12)**	-0.51 (.15)***
<i>Age</i>	-	-	-	1.88 (.07)***
<i>Gender</i>	-	-	-	-0.15 (.03)***
<i>Education</i>	-	-	-	0.93 (.07)***
<i>Interest</i>	-	-	-	1.05 (.05)***
<i>Awareness (newspapers)</i>	-	-	-	0.39 (.08)***
<i>Efficacy</i>	-	-	-	0.15 (.05)***
<i>Party attachment</i>	-	-	-	1.00 (.03)***
<i>Party membership</i>	-	-	-	0.81 (.11)***
<i>Social trust</i>	-	-	-	0.26 (.06)***
<i>Voluntary work for pol. org</i>	-	-	-	0.47 (.05)***
<i>Confidence Parliament</i>	-	-	-	0.71 (.06)***
<i>Satisfaction with democracy</i>	-	-	-	0.33 (.07)***
<b>Country Level</b>				
Compulsory Voting	-	-	-	1.02 (.31)***
Unemployment	-	-	-	0.81 (.40)**
<b>RANDOM EFFECTS</b>				
Individual level ( $\sigma^2_{\mu 0}$ )	1 (0)**	1 (0)**	1 (0)**	1 (0)**
Contextual level ( $\sigma^2_{\mu 0}$ )	0.31 (.09)**	0.31 (.09)***	0.32 (.09)***	0.24 (.07)***
Slope variance	-	-	0.30 (.11)**	0.45 (.16)**
Covariance	-	-	-0.12 (.07)	-0.05 (.08)
<b>MODEL PROPERTIES</b>				
Number of cases (countries)	40853 (25)	40853 (25)	40853 (25)	40853 (25)
Wald (Joint $\chi^2$ ) (df)	146.1 (1)	219.3 (2)	149.1 (2)	4845.5 (16)

Note: Not standardized coefficients with standard errors in brackets. All independent variables were rescaled on a scale of 0-1 where 0 indicates the lowest value and 1 the highest value of the variable. Coefficients indicate the change associated with moving from the lowest to the highest value. The Wald test is an approximate  $\chi^2$ -based test of the model fit. All models calculated with the `runmlwin`-command in Stata 11, first-order MQL binominal restricted maximum likelihood estimations; \* significant at the 90% level ; \*\* significant at the 95% level; \*\*\* significant at the 99% level.

<sup>26</sup> In a logit-model, the share of variance of the individual level is equal to 3.29 (Snijders & Bosker, 1999, p. 224). Therefore, the overall variance (3.29+.31=3.60) can be attributed to 9% to the context (.31/3.60) and to 91% to the individual characteristics (3.29/3.60).

As for these controls, the results mostly support our assumptions. Age, education, political skills – such as interest, awareness, and efficacy – social capital (in terms of social trust and membership), political capital (in terms of party attachment and party membership), and political support – as confidence in parliament and satisfaction with democracy – all had the expected positive and significant effect on an individual’s electoral participation. The same holds true for the contextual determinants. As expected, compulsory voting and unemployment foster voter turnout. Individuals who live in a country with compulsory participation and high unemployment rates have a higher probability to go to the polls than individuals who live in countries with high employment rates but without an institutionalized duty to vote.<sup>27</sup>

The only counterintuitive effect is observed with regard to the gender variable. It seems that the traditional gender gap has not only diminished, but indeed reversed (also see Conway, Steuernagel, & Ahern, 2005). In other words, women have a higher propensity to participate in national elections than men in our sample of 25 democracies. However, for our purposes, the most important result is the stable and negative impact of belonging to an ethnic minority group on electoral participation.

In the next step, we analyzed whether the negative effect of belonging to an ethnic minority group on electoral participation is attenuated by the six institutions discussed above. Table 3 summarizes the findings. For each institution, we ran a model with the same individual and contextual controls as in Table 2. Table 3 shows that all control variables maintain their explanatory power. At the country level, only one of our six institutions had a direct impact on electoral participation. Federalism, at least in terms of authority of subnational states over taxing, spending, and legislating, had a negative impact on an individual’s electoral participation. Disproportionality, a proportional system, suffrage rights, the number of government parties, and the possibility for subnational elections did not have a significant direct effect on an individual’s propensity to go to the polls.

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<sup>27</sup> We tested for additional macro controls discussed in the literature. However, the age of the democracy, population size, gross domestic product per capita, and share of farmers did not show a significant relationship with electoral participation. Given the low number of countries, we decided to include only the significant contextual variables in the models.



**Table 3 : Institutional Remedies for Low Ethnic Minority Participation**

	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
<b>FIXED EFFECTS</b>						
Constant	-1.58 (.52)***	-1.98 (.31)***	-2.25 (.44)***	-1.47 (.27)***	-1.56 (.20)***	-1.53 (.28)***
<b>Individual Level</b>						
<i>Ethnic Minority</i>	-1.89 (.63)***	-0.80 (.37)**	-0.28 (.48)	-0.45 (.25)*	-0.38 (.18)**	-0.54 (.27)*
<i>Age</i>	1.88 (.07)***	1.89 (.07)***	1.89 (.07)***	1.89 (.07)***	1.89 (.07)***	1.89 (.07)***
<i>Gender</i>	-0.15 (.03)***	-0.15 (.03)***	-0.15 (.03)***	-0.15 (.03)***	-0.15 (.03)***	-0.15 (.03)***
<i>Education</i>	0.94 (.07)***	0.94 (.07)***	0.94 (.07)***	0.94 (.07)***	0.94 (.07)***	0.94 (.07)***
<i>Interest</i>	1.05 (.05)***	1.06 (.05)***	1.06 (.05)***	1.06 (.05)***	1.06 (.05)***	1.06 (.05)***
<i>Awareness (newspapers)</i>	0.39 (.08)***	0.39 (.08)***	0.39 (.08)***	0.39 (.08)***	0.39 (.08)***	0.39 (.08)***
<i>Efficacy</i>	0.15 (.05)***	0.15 (.05)***	0.15 (.05)***	0.15 (.05)***	0.15 (.05)***	0.15 (.05)***
<i>Party attachment</i>	1.00 (.03)***	1.01 (.03)**	1.01 (.03)**	1.01 (.03)**	1.01 (.03)**	1.01 (.03)**
<i>Party membership</i>	0.81 (.11)***	0.81 (.11)***	0.81 (.11)***	0.81 (.11)***	0.81 (.11)***	0.81 (.11)***
<i>Social trust</i>	0.26 (.06)***	0.26 (.06)***	0.26 (.06)***	0.26 (.06)***	0.26 (.06)***	0.26 (.06)***
<i>Voluntary Work f. pol. org</i>	0.47 (.05)***	0.47 (.05)***	0.47 (.05)***	0.47 (.05)***	0.47 (.05)***	0.47 (.05)***
<i>Confidence Parliament</i>	0.72 (.06)***	0.72 (.06)***	0.72 (.06)***	0.71 (.07)***	0.71 (.07)***	0.71 (.07)***
<i>Satisfaction with dem</i>	0.33 (.07)***	0.33 (.07)***	0.33 (.07)***	0.33 (.07)***	0.33 (.07)***	0.33 (.07)***
<b>Country Level</b>						
Compulsory voting	1.06 (.38)***	0.87 (.30)***	1.08 (.30)***	0.98 (.31)***	0.94 (.29)***	0.97 (.32)***
Unemployment	0.77 (.43)*	0.85 (.39)**	1.04 (.42)**	0.74 (.41)*	0.92 (.37)**	0.80 (.41)**
Suffrage rights	-0.04 (.68)	-	-	-	-	-
PR system	-	0.42 (.27)	-	-	-	-
Disproportionality of electoral system	-	-	0.72 (.44)	-	-	-
Number of government parties	-	-	-	-0.26 (.35)	-	-
Subnational authority	-	-	-	-	-0.39 (.21)*	-
Subnational elections	-	-	-	-	-	-0.11 (.23)
<b>Interaction Terms</b>						
Suffrage rights * Minority	1.88 (.83)**	-	-	-	-	-
PR system * Minority	-	0.36 (.41)	-	-	-	-
Disproportionality * Minority	-	-	-0.33 (.64)	-	-	-
Number of government parties * Minority	-	-	-	-0.23 (.52)	-	-
Subnational authority * Minority	-	-	-	-	-0.48 (.34)	-
Subnational elections * Minority	-	-	-	-	-	0.04 (.33)
<b>RANDOM EFFECTS</b>						
Individual level ( $\sigma^2_{\mu 0}$ )	1 (0)**	1 (0)**	1 (0)**	1 (0)**	1 (0)**	1 (0)**
Contextual level ( $\sigma^2_{\mu 0}$ )	0.25 (.07)**	0.24 (.07)**	0.23 (.07)**	0.25 (.07)**	0.22 (.06)**	0.25 (.07)**
Slope Variance	0.39 (.14)**	0.47 (.17)**	0.49 (.17)**	0.48 (.17)**	0.45 (.16)**	0.47 (.17)**
Covariance	-0.05 (.07)	-0.08 (.08)	-0.04 (.08)	-0.07 (.08)	-0.09 (.07)	-0.05 (.08)
<b>MODEL PROPERTIES</b>						
Number of cases (countries)	40853 (25)	40853 (25)	40853 (25)	40853 (25)	40853 (25)	40853 (25)
Wald (Joint Chi <sup>2</sup> )	4878.7 (18)	3615.0 (18)	4058.0 (18)	8397.1 (18)	8621.9 (18)	5284.9 (18)

Note: Not standardized coefficients with standard errors in brackets. All independent variables were rescaled on a scale of 0-1 where 0 indicates the lowest value and 1 the highest value of the variable. Coefficients indicate the change associated with moving from the lowest to the highest value. The Wald test is an approximate Chi<sup>2</sup>-based test of the model fit. All models calculated runmlwin-command in Stata 11, first-order MQL binominal restricted maximum likelihood estimations; \* significant at the 90% level ; \*\* significant at the 95% level; \*\*\* significant at the 99% level

Of course, we are interested in the indirect effect of these institutions (i.e., interactive impact) on political participation. As hypothesized, individuals who belong to an ethnic minority group are less likely to participate in national elections when neither power-sharing nor

power-dividing institutions are present. In line with our expectations, three of the six institutions seem to have a moderating impact on the probability of voting – indicated by the positive sign of the interaction terms. However, the information provided in Table 3 does not suffice for a satisfactory interpretation of the interaction terms and the hypotheses (Brambor et al. 2006). To evaluate the proposed attenuating effect more closely we present the marginal effects of belonging to an ethnic minority in Figure 1 and Table 4. Five out of the six interactions were significant<sup>28</sup>, but only one of the institutions showed the expected *attenuating* effect. Figure 1 illustrates that suffrage rights have a positive impact on ethnic minorities' propensity to vote until a threshold of .82 is reached. Above this threshold, increased suffrage has no longer a significant effect. In other words, the less people are excluded from voting, the higher is the electoral participation of ethnic minorities.

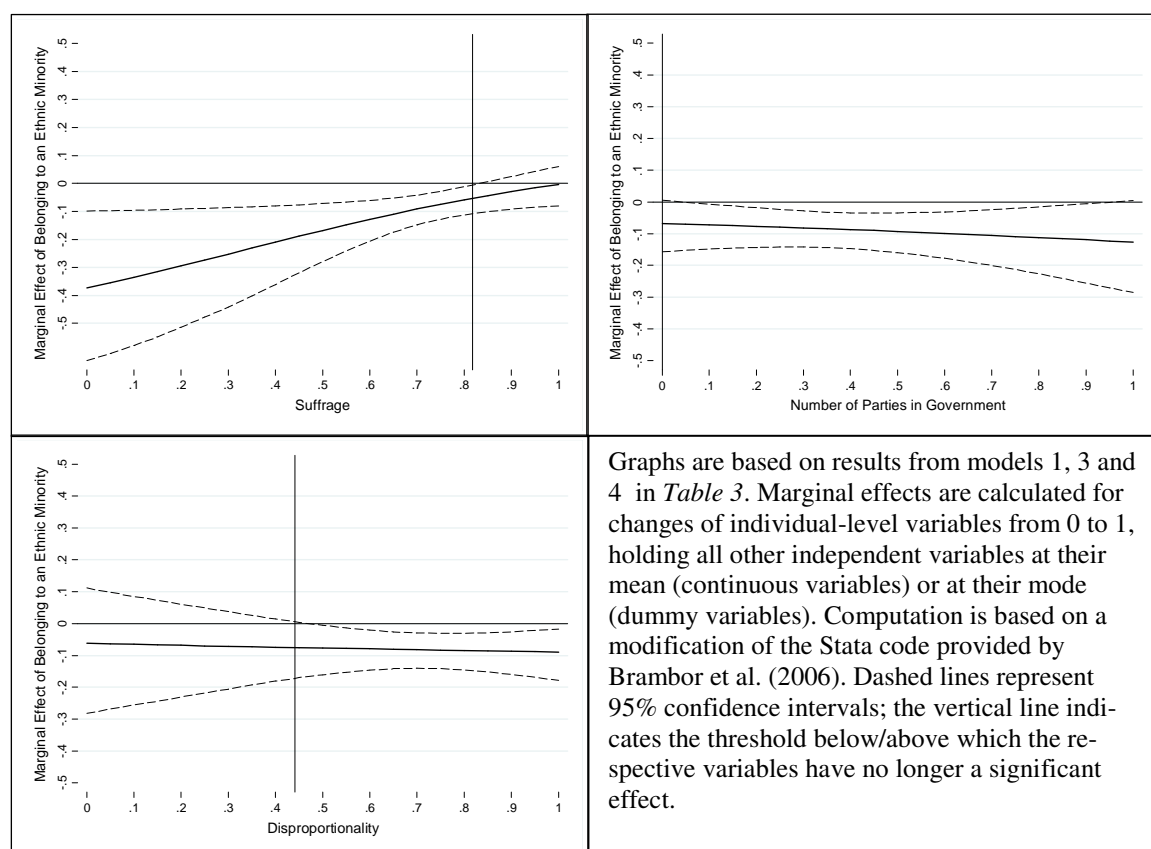
The remaining four institutions which show a significant interactive impact are subnational authority, subnational elections, the number of parties in government and disproportionality. Contrary to our expectation, the effects are all negative. The graphs for the number of governmental parties and the disproportionality of the electoral system reveal, however, that the effects are far from substantial – indicated through the extremely flat curve. Likewise, the negative effect for the possibility of subnational elections is very small and reduces the probability to vote for individuals belonging to ethnic minorities by only 2 per cent.

By contrast, the effect of subnational authority is strong and, contrary to our expectations, negative. This means that the already low propensity of national electoral participation among individuals belonging to an ethnic minority group is even lower in decentralized countries (i.e., countries where the subnational units have high authority over taxing, spending, and legislating). Individuals belonging to an ethnic minority group (with all control variables set to their mean or mode, respectively) had a predicted probability of 0.81 of going to the polls. This probability decreased to 0.73 in countries with high subnational authority. This indicator also lowered – to a lesser degree – the participation propensity of majorities from 0.85 to 0.80.

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<sup>28</sup> With regard to Figure 1, one can see whether an effect is significant by considering the 90% confidence intervals around the line – it is statistically significant whenever the upper and lower bounds of the confidence interval are both above (or below) zero. For the results in Table 4 an effect is significant if the values at 0 and at 1 are both significant.

**Figure 1:** *Marginal Effect of Belonging to an Ethnic Minority on political Participation*



**Table 4:** *Marginal Effect of Belonging to an Ethnic Minority on political participation*

Variables	Values of Institutions	Coefficients (standard errors in brackets)	Predicted Probabilities
Subnational Elections	0	1.22 (.31)**	.77
	1	1.11 (.28)**	.75
Subnational Authority	0	1.42 (.18)**	.81
	1	1.02 (.25)**	.73
Proportional Representation	0	0.53 (.40)	.63
	1	0.98 (.37)**	.72

Note: Computation of predicted probabilities is based on the `adjust`-command in Stata 11. All control variables are held constant at their mean (continuous variables) or mode (dummy variables). We report unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in brackets.

Therefore, whereas widespread suffrage has an inclusive effect on ethnic minorities, federalism – at least in terms of subnational authority – has clearly an exclusive effect.<sup>29</sup> These results can be interpreted based upon the critics discussed above, which argue that subnational authority only increases the incentives to influence politics at *the subnational*

<sup>29</sup> We also tested other vertical institutions - e.g bicameralism - to see whether this negative effect is limited to "subnational authority". However, the effect was not significant and, therefore, not interpretable.

*level*. Hence, when politics is important at the subnational level, it is more rational for individuals to participate there. At the same time, according to the hypothesis of voter fatigue (Rallings et al., 2003), subnational authority lowers the propensity to participate at the national level. However, two things are worth noting. First, given our data, we could not test this ad-hoc explanation. We should test this assumption with the propensity to vote at subnational elections. Second, the fact that the negative interactive effect of subnational authority was stronger for ethnic minorities than for ethnic majorities should give us pause for reflection. This could be interpreted as a sign of an exclusive effect of federalism in comparison to horizontal power-sharing institutions. However, the findings included in Table 3 weaken these interpretations since disproportionality, the number of government parties, and subnational elections do not have a substantial interactive effect on political participation.

## Concluding Remarks

The aim of this paper was to test whether individuals belonging to ethnic minority groups have a lower propensity to vote and whether there are institutions which attenuate this negative effect. We argued that it is irrational for minorities to go to the polls when they have no chance to influence the voting decisions. However, at the same time, this behavior is undemocratic and deleterious for national cohesion: It is argued that neither the normative democratic ideals of equality and responsiveness nor the empirical necessity of stability due to confidence in the political system is upheld when minority groups exclude themselves from politics. However, we know at least since the work of Lijphart (1977, 1999) that there are institutional remedies for minority inclusion. Widespread suffrage as well as vertical and horizontal power-sharing institutions are suggested to include minorities because they give them a possibility to have a say. In rational choice logic, these institutions increase the benefit of voting for minorities and, consequently, motivate them to participate in elections.

We investigated the utility of these suggestions with several multi-level analyses that modeled the interactive impact of the institutions on the effect of belonging to an ethnic minority group on voting propensity. The results generally indicated a negative relationship of ethnic minority membership on the probability of voting. However, two of the six measures for inclusive institutions had a significant *and* substantive moderating effect. Specifically, widespread suffrage attenuated the negative effect, whereas subnational authority over taxing, spending, and legislating intensified it.

These results can be discussed in light of growing heterogeneization of democratic societies. In fact, most Western democracies face growing migration which challenges national cohesion and sparks debates about inclusion and exclusion on the political agenda. Of course, one solution might be to close the borders by adopting restrictive immigration policies. Supported by right-wing parties that benefit from the fear of heterogeneity, governments justify such policies by arguing that more ethnic diversity puts the national identity in danger. However, most countries already have a relatively high number of ethnic minorities, including immigrants (e.g., people of Turkish descent in Germany and people of former colonies in the United Kingdom) and indigenous peoples (e.g., the Maori in New Zealand). Closing the borders will not solve the problem. On the contrary, it might increase the danger of growing mistrust and political instability or even negatively affect the inclusion of minority groups.

Contrary to the exclusion solution, our first finding proposes that the extension of political rights, such as suffrage rights, can foster the inclusion of ethnic minorities in the electoral process. As mentioned above, we analyzed only ethnic minorities who already have the right to vote. Nevertheless, the motivation to go to the polls is higher for ethnic minorities when suffrage is widespread. We argue that this can be interpreted as a sign of an inclusive culture. The more individuals are given the right to have a say, the more inclusive is the political culture and, consequently, the higher is the motivation for electoral participation.

The second finding seems to challenge the initial idea of Lijphart (1999). Horizontal power sharing is not inclusive in terms of mobilizing ethnic minorities. On the contrary, when subnational regions are given high autonomy, the inclusion of ethnic minorities through the electoral channel is limited. In fact, the propensity of an individual who belongs to an ethnic minority group to go to the polls is even lower in federalist than in unitarian countries. However, we should interpret this result cautiously because it might have two causes. First, this finding can be interpreted as “voter fatigue” (Rallings et al., 2003). In federal states, citizens must vote not only for national, but also for subnational public authorities. Second, low participation propensity for national elections in countries with autonomous subnational regions might be compensated by higher participation at the subnational level. Results of electoral research in Switzerland (Ladner & Bühlmann, 2006) show that individual interest in national politics and individual participation in national elections can be partly explained by language region. In other words, minority groups are less interested in national politics and show a lower propensity to go to the polls than their compatriots. However, compared to the

majority group, they have more interest in local politics. In one of our models, we tested for the impact of subnational elections. The direct effect of this variable was negative, but not significant, and there was no substantial interactive effect. Thus, the first interpretation seems to have more support in this study than the second: vertical power dividing has an exclusive impact on ethnic minorities concerning their participation at the national level

However, this finding is somewhat puzzling. On the one hand, shifting power to subnational entities can increase the power of minorities. Results of additional research conducted by the authors not presented here (Bühlmann & Hänni, 2010) show that ethnic minorities have less diffuse political support but that this is attenuated by vertical power dividing. Thus, providing ethnic minorities with the possibility of living autonomously in their own culture in subnational entities strengthens national cohesion in terms of diffuse support. On the other hand, our results presented here showed that power shifting seems to occur at the cost of inclusion at the national level, at least in terms of national elections or – so to speak – specific support. However, it is unclear whether we can speak of inclusion when ethnic minorities are less motivated to co-decide on national political representation because they have better opportunities at the subnational level.

Our results cannot yet provide to solve this puzzle. Additional refined research on this topic is necessary. First, the data we used can only offer a vague insight into the complexity of ethnic heterogeneity. The self-evaluation of a respondent regarding whether he or she belongs to an ethnic minority group can only yield superficial insights. We do not know to which ethnic group the respondents belong and, therefore, cannot control for important characteristics of these groups, such as size, regional concentration, or political power. Second, in order to really test whether the negative interactive impact of federalism is a sign of too many elections or a sign of a trade-off between subnational inclusion and national exclusion, we should investigate participation behavior at different federal levels.

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